

To the Editor,

**Julian Ochorowicz on Eusapia Palladino,
Dissociation and Mediumistic Fraud**

The recent issue of the *Journal* with articles about Angelos Tanagras, René Sudre and Inácio Ferreira reminds us of the importance of material published in languages other than English to further our knowledge about the history of psychical research. With this purpose in mind I present in this letter a summary of an article published in French that was cited by many in the old literature. The article was by Polish philosopher and psychologist Julian Ochorowicz (1850–1917), who was known in his times for his writings about mental suggestion, animal magnetism and hypnotism, and physical mediumship, among other topics (Ochorowicz, 1887/1891, 1909, 1910; on Ochorowicz see Alvarado, 2009; Domanski, 2003). One of these other topics, and the subject of this communication, was mediumistic fraud.

Ochorowicz's (1896a) paper, published in the *Annales des sciences psychiques*, was concerned with mediumistic fraud in the case of the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino (on this medium see Alvarado, 1993, and Carrington, 1909). By the time he was writing, Palladino had become well known on account of the séances held by Cesare Lombroso and his associates (Ciolfi, 1891), and by the celebrated 1892 Milan Commission that involved several instrumental tests (Aksakof et al., 1893), among other reports. The paper was basically a critique of séances conducted at Cambridge with Palladino by members of the Society for Psychical Research such as Richard Hodgson, Frederic W. H. Myers, and Henry and Eleanor Sidgwick, among others (General Meeting, 1895, pp. 131–135; Sidgwick, 1895).

Ochorowicz stated that his purpose was to present comments about the Cambridge sittings in the context of knowledge acquired by previous researchers. In his view the Cambridge researchers were not familiar enough with previous work with the medium, or with the psychology of mediumship in general. Ochorowicz also presented details of his own séances with Palladino at Warsaw and elsewhere. "The Cambridge experimenters," he wrote, "did not admit in their report more than two alternatives: *real phenomena* and *conscious fraud*" (p.96, this, and other translations, are mine). Such a view was considered simplistic by Ochorowicz because he said they failed to consider unconscious fraud. Ochorowicz believed that in addition to conscious fraud, there was unconscious fraud in the waking state and in trance (which he described as "inferior mediumship"), and partial automatic fraud and phenomena without fraud (which formed the superior manifestations of mediumship). He stated that the SPR researchers had neglected to find out whether the medium was in trance, and that, assuming trance, it was "illogical to assume *conscious* fraud in the *trance* state!" (p.98). Unconscious fraud, Ochorowicz wrote, is not remembered in the normal state. Consequently it could not be affirmed for certain that the medium perpetrated conscious fraud.

Ochorowicz said that he found in séances he held in Warsaw that Palladino lost feeling in her feet, and moved them with no awareness of doing so.

Furthermore, he believed that suspicious movements made by the medium could be "*motor representations that rule in a given moment the medium's imagination*" (p.100, italics in the original). To show that Palladino was capable of unconscious behaviour Ochorowicz recounted an experience he had in Warsaw. The medium, sleeping in a chamber adjacent to the one occupied by Ochorowicz and his wife, came into their room, opened and closed a drawer, and left carefully without making any noise. They went quickly into her room and found her sleeping. She woke up and told them she had not left the room. The following day she was upset and disturbed that they thought she would enter their room in that way at night. Ochorowicz believed the medium was in a somnambulistic state when she came into his room. They had a table-tilting séance and messages purporting to come from her spirit control John King stated, in answers to questions posed by Ochorowicz, that the medium was neither in trance nor in her normal state, but in a spontaneous somnambulistic state—she was looking for matches. Ochorowicz considered that this sleep-walking incident was a real dissociative event. He wrote that Palladino was a "woman capable of being in an entirely different psychic state from one moment to another" (p.102). This led him to ask, referring to the Cambridge séances, whether it was fair to accuse her of fraud "without the least medical and psychological examination" (p.102).

Elaborating further on dissociation, Ochorowicz wrote that the medium should be given time to pass through the first stages of "physiological doubling", or dissociation. Such stages were stated to be those taking place "between the brain and the automatic centres" of the nervous system, between the medium's consciousness and "somnambulistic representation or auto-suggestions", and between the "dynamism of its limbs and the limbs themselves" (p.109). Trickery was said to take place when the last stage was reached. This was the case because the medium was not aware of the location and sensibility of her limbs, lacking criteria to distinguish a "movement done at a distance" from movement of her limbs (p.109). Also related to dissociative states, Ochorowicz wrote that John King was not a spirit nor an independent force, but a "special psychic state that allowed the vital dynamism of the medium . . . to act out at a distance in certain exceptional conditions" (p.104). Such reference to "vital dynamism" referred to ideas of biophysical forces prevalent before and during Ochorowicz's times (Alvarado, 2006), and to his own beliefs in magnetic action and emanations from mediums (Alvarado, 2009). In the paper he referred to the collective agency of these forces, noting that dynamometric readings of the sitters he took in séances with Palladino showed that they "lose part of their forces" (p.107). He asked: "is all superior mediumship other than a collective psychophysical creation?" (pp. 108–109).

In his attempt to show that the Cambridge researchers were too simplistic by focusing only on conscious trickery, Ochorowicz argued that some of the medium's suspicious actions were motor reflexes. Others were attempts to produce phenomena in any way possible, or were reactions to real phenomena, as when she had contractions when there were physical phenomena taking place. These contractions, which were said to be synchronized to the occurrence of phenomena, were frequently observed with Palladino (e.g. Carrington, 1909, pp.91–92, 113; Lodge, 1894, pp.332–333).

In other sections of the paper Ochorowicz considered various aspects affecting séances. These included the sitters providing psychic force, the importance of avoiding sitters in bad health, and the relative unimportance of having faith in the phenomena. He believed the sitters should not control the medium too strictly at the beginning of the séance because the first phenomena were of the inferior type, manifestations such as unconscious contractions. Ochorowicz also reminded his readers — and the Cambridge researchers — that sitters could suggest ideas to the medium, the manifestations taking the character of the beliefs projected by the group. As evidence of this he stated that when the medium was among materialists John King could take the form of an impersonal force, but in small spiritist groups they could get manifestations of the ‘forms’ of the deceased—a reference to materializations.

Furthermore, if surrounding individuals had in their minds the idea of fraud, as Ochorowicz said was the case at Cambridge, the medium could receive the suggestion to commit fraud. In fact, Hodgson, the leading SPR sceptic against the medium, was considered by Ochorowicz to be the main culprit not only in assuming frauds he did not discover, but in influencing sitters’ opinions and suggesting fraud to the medium. Ochorowicz wrote about the Cambridge situation that Palladino did not seem to be a medium, but “a typewriter, who works through the fingers of Mr. Hodgson” (p.112).

In addition to comments about ‘doubling’ and openness to suggestion, Ochorowicz had a section in the paper about variables related to the medium. In his view, disease and nervous depletion could block superior phenomena, and the latter, as well as boredom, encouraged fraud. Eating before the séance was said to affect the quality of the phenomena. Finally, Ochorowicz considered external conditions affecting mediumship. Physical variables such as temperature and atmospheric conditions did not appear to result in changes to the medium “except in extreme cases or indirectly through psychic [psychological] influence” (p.116). Superior mediumship, Ochorowicz believed, needed assistance from researchers to develop properly: “in superior mediumism it is not enough to observe. We have to assist the creation of phenomena. The medium is an instrument that has to be properly handled by controlling negative influences affecting its performance” (p.123).

Ochorowicz’s article continued to be cited years after it was published (e.g. Croq, 1900, p.499; Geley, 1927, p.20; Grasset, 1903, pp.550–551; before the paper appeared in the *Annales* it was published in De Rochas, 1896, pp.196–254, and was translated into Italian in the *Rivista di Studi Psicici*, Ochorowicz, 1896b).¹ A positive evaluation of the work comes from the pen of Enrico Morselli (1908): “Deep and convincing critique of the negative Cambridge report: the renowned scientist examines with a tight logic and with rare psychological shrewdness the thesis of fraud . . . O.’s report on Palladino . . . is masterful for the solution of the question of conscious and unconscious fraud of mediums” (p.149).

Leaving aside the criticisms of the SPR investigation, and their validity or lack of it, I believe the most important part of Ochorowicz’s paper was his discussion of fraud. Even if not everyone found his arguments convincing,

¹ I thank Cecilia Magnanensi for the Ochorowicz (1896b) reference.

Ochorowicz's article was an influential contribution that deserves to be remembered as part of the history of speculations about the psychology of mediumship.

Division of Perceptual Studies

CARLOS S. ALVARADO

Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences

210 10th St. NE, Suite 100

University of Virginia Health System

Charlottesville, VA, 22902

csa3m@virginia.edu

REFERENCES

- Aksakof, A., Schiaparelli, G., du Prel, C., Brofferio, A., Gerosa, G., Ermacora, G. B., Finzi, G. Richet, C. and Lombroso, C. (1893) Rapport de la commission réunie à Milan pour l'étude des phénomènes psychiques. *Annales des sciences psychiques* 3, 39–64.
- Alvarado, C. S. (1993) Gifted subjects' contributions to psychical research: the case of Eusapia Palladino. *JSPR* 59, 269–292.
- Alvarado, C. S. (2006) Human radiations: concepts of force in mesmerism, spiritualism and psychical research. *JSPR* 70, 138–162.
- Alvarado, C. S. (2009) Modern animal magnetism: the work of Julian Ochorowicz, Alexandre Baréty, and Émile Boirac. *Australian Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 37, 1–15.
- Carrington, H. (1909) *Eusapia Palladino and Her Phenomena*. New York: B. W. Dodge.
- Ciolfi, E. (1891) Les expériences de Naples. *Annales des sciences psychiques* 1, 326–332.
- Croq, Docteur [J]. (1900) *L'hypnotisme scientifique* (2nd edition). Paris: Société d'Éditions Scientifiques.
- de Rochas, A. (1896) *L'extériorisation de la motricité: Recueil d'expériences et d'observations*. Paris: Chamuel.
- Domanski, C. W. (2003) Julian Ochorowicz (1850–1917) et son apport dans le développement de la psychologie du XIXe siècle. *Psychologie et Histoire*, 4. Retrieved September 7, 2009, from <http://psychologieethistoire.googlepages.com/jlochoro.htm>
- Geley, G. (1927) *Clairvoyance and Materialisation: A Record of Experiments*. London: T. Fisher Unwin. [First published in French in 1924]
- General Meeting. (1895) *JSPR* 7, 131–138.
- Grasset, J. (1903) *Leçons de clinique médicale faites à l'hôpital Saint-Éloi de Montpellier: Avril 1898 à décembre 1902*. Montpellier: Coulet.
- Lodge, O. J. (1894) Experience of unusual physical phenomena occurring in the presence of an entranced person (Eusapia Paladino). *JSPR* 6, 306–336, 346–360.
- Morselli, E. (1908) *Psicologia e 'Spiritismo', Vol. 1*. Turin: Fratelli Bocca.
- Ochorowicz, J. (1891) *Mental Suggestion* (trans. J. Fitzgerald). New York: Humbolt. [Original work published 1887]
- Ochorowicz, J. (1896a) La question de la fraude dans les expériences avec Eusapia Paladino. *Annales des sciences psychiques* 6, 79–123.
- Ochorowicz, J. (1896b) La questione della frode negli esperimenti coll'Eusapia Paladino. *Rivista di Studi Psicici* 2, 185–201, 217–242.
- Ochorowicz, J. (1909) Hypnotisme et mesmerisme. In Richet, C. (ed.) *Dictionnaire de physiologie*, Vol. 8, 709–778. Paris: Félix Alcan.
- Ochorowicz, J. (1910) Les rayons rigides et les rayons X^{*}: Études expérimentales. *Annales des sciences psychiques* 20, 97–105, 129–136, 172–178, 204–209, 225–231, 257–263, 295–302, 336–344, 357–370.
- Sidgwick, H. (1895) Eusapia Paladino. *JSPR* 7, 148–159.

Copyright of Journal of the Society for Psychical Research is the property of Society for Psychical Research and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.